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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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MEMORANDUM

ITALY: TNF--AN UPDATE

Summary

Since last December's parliamentary vote ratifying the Italian government's decision to participate in the TNF modernization program, the prospects for Rome following through on its pledge have become uncertain. The vote has undermined the fragile political consensus that has kept Prime Minister Cossiga in office since last August and has helped revive the question of Communist participation in a future government. If --as now seems likely--the present government collapses in the near future, substantive issues such as TNF are likely to be subordinated to the "Communist question" for the duration of the anticipated crisis--perhaps as long as a year--although TNF could become a bargaining chip in the interparty negotiations to form a new government.

The Communist Question

The key to Cossiga's hold on power has been Socialists' willingness to abstain on important parliamentary votes. The TNF vote began a process that has called this arrangement into question by precipitating first the reemergence of factional squabbling among the Socialists and then the party's threat to withdraw its essential prop for the government. Leftwing Socialists disagreed at the eleventh hour with Party Secretary Craxi's support for participation in the TNF program, and perhaps half of the Socialist delegation deserted the government on the December vote.

The intraparty dispute continued to grow, and at a Socialist Central Committee meeting earlier this month, the matter came to a head. The party's left wing--led by Deputy Secretary Signorile, former Secretary De Martino and newly-elected Party President Lombardi--forced Craxi and his supporters to agree to abandon Cossiga if his Christian Democratic Party

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failed at its congress in February to sanction a government coalition including both the Socialists and Communists.

It is very unlikely the Christian Democrats will decide to yield to the Socialist ultimatum. The positions taken at the recently-held Christian Democratic local party congresses seem to indicate that the party will adopt the position espoused by its own left wing--led by Cossiga, Party Secretary Zaccagnini and former Prime Minister Andreotti. These leaders maintain that some type of Communist participation in the government--short of holding cabinet seats--is necessary if the country is to begin to deal effectively with its persistent problems. Christian Democratic moderates and conservatives, including Senate President Fanfani, Party Vice Secretary Donat Cattin and Minister of Industry Bisaglia, continue to prefer the eventual formation of a five party non-Communist majority resting on the Socialists--even though this alternative is rather clearly foreclosed for the time being.

For their part, Communist chief Berlinguer and his allies, who dominate their party's leadership, are unlikely to budge from their demands for direct Communist participation in the government. The Communists' experience during 1978 as part of the parliamentary majority supporting the government generated great dissatisfaction among the party rank and file--an attitude which was confirmed by the Communists' poor performance in last June's general election. Consequently, it is improbable that Berlinguer would agree to a similar arrangement--particularly in view of next June's nationwide local elections.

It is still uncertain that the Socialists will follow through on their threat; many party leaders fear their role in precipitating a crisis would hurt the party's chances in the June elections. However, the combative mood of the Socialist left wing makes it likely the party will back up its ultimatum with action.

If the government does fall, the proximity of the local elections makes it highly unlikely that any party would make the concessions necessary for the formation of a new government, for fear of damaging its prospects at the polls. In this case, there may be little choice but to piece together a caretaker government to last until the vote and the subsequent reassessment of party positions are completed. Only then could serious negotiations on the resolution of the crisis begin. The continued reluctance of the Christian Democrats to meet the Communists' demands for a clear stake in power and of the Communists' to settle for anything less virtually guarantees that any agreement will unfold slowly, probably over the course of a year or more.

The Role of TNF

These more pressing problems--survival of the government and the "Communist question"--have pushed TNF into the background, and it is likely to remain there at least for the time being. However, the Communists have kept the issue alive to use as part of their litany of attacks on the government and to buttress their arguments for a direct governing role. The Communists' position

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on TNF is very similar to that of many Dutch, Danish and German Social Democrats who have requested a six month postponement of the Alliance decision and the suspension of SS-20 production and deployment by Moscow. The Italian party has maintained that these measures are necessary to facilitate talks between NATO and the Warsaw Pact designed to determine whether an imbalance of European forces exists and--if necessary--to reestablish the equilibrium by cutting, rather than increasing, the number of missiles.

The Communists have tried to capitalize on the recent increase in international tensions to bolster their "detente" arguments against TNF. They hope to counteract the perception that these developments have made TNF modernization even more necessary by exploiting the growing Italian fears over the future of detente--a concept that has broad popular appeal in Italy as the foundation of world peace and stability.

For instance, while condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and calling for the withdrawal of Moscow's troops, the Communists have argued that the move was only the latest in a series of "tension-heightening" developments--among which the TNF controversy must be counted. In their view, if the government were to keep its TNF pledge, the result would be a further blow to detente. The Communist position vis a vis the government seems to have been strengthened further by the suspension of the SALT II ratification process and uncertain prospects for other disarmament initiatives which collectively were seen by most Italians as essential complements to the TNF program. In addition, the government will be particularly vulnerable to Communist claims that by going along with the modernization, Rome will be echoing US policy uncritically; this issue may come up in conjunction with Italian efforts to obtain a "two-key" system in the program.

Under these circumstances, and given the likelihood that the Socialists may be prepared to back the Communists, it is very unlikely that Cossiga--or a successor--would even consider raising the contentious TNF issue in the near future. Although the government's formal decision to participate will remain intact, Italy's ability to implement its pledge may remain in limbo--perhaps as long as a year-- until the emergence of a more stable governing majority.

Nonetheless, Cossiga--who may be tapped to succeed himself as caretaker--remains committed to Italian participation in the TNF program and may be working to obtain at least tacit Communist acquiescence in the government's decision. He was encouraged by the Communists' determination--prior to the vote--to resist intense Soviet pressure to adopt a tougher line and their refusal to exploit nascent popular opposition to the program in Italy. Cossiga may be convinced that he can extract still further concessions from the Communists on issues such as TNF by offering them a some what greater role in the governing process following the June election.

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It is possible that Berlinguer--if he emerges from the vote with his leadership and policies confirmed--might prove to be more flexible than he can be now in negotiations on both domestic and international issues. But his price for cooperation on TNF--which could take the form of his party abstaining on any future TNF vote--would probably hinge on the Christian Democrats' acceptance of a process leading to direct Communist participation in the government.

Bolstering Italian Support

In the interim, there are several areas in which Italian support for TNF can be strengthened. The Italian press played a significant role in presenting a balanced view of the issue prior to the December parliamentary debate; this must be continued if Rome is to follow through on its commitment. Stefano Silvestri of L'Europeo and Eugenio Scalfari of La Repubblica, journalists whose opinions are respected in intellectual and "socialist" circles, can be very helpful in maintaining public approval of Italian participation in the TNF program. Silvestri has backed the Alliance decision, while Scalfari--although agreeing in principle--adopted the "six month delay" argument in the latter stages of last year's debate.

The defection of left wing Socialists from the government's position in the December vote creates particular cause for concern about TNF's future in Italy. Men such as Signorile, De Martino, Lombardi and Giacomo Mancini seemed to spearhead the left wing's last minute refusal to proceed with the decision--unless a provision were added to reverse Italy's pledge of support if success in disarmament talks made such a move practical. The support of this group will be essential if the government is to strengthen its hand on this issue in the upcoming months and avoid the embarrassing situation of being sustained on TNF only by the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement.

Even the support of some Christian Democrats seems uncertain. For example, the government was expected to command about four hundred votes last December, but it garnered only three hundred twenty eight on the key resolution. It is unclear which parties--aside from the Socialists--deserted the government, but the strong public support expressed by the smaller parties and the relative silence of the Christian Democrats seem to indicate that many of the "no-shows" came from Cossiga's own party. It is very likely that Zaccagnini, Andreotti, Guido Bodrato and Ciriaco De Mita--to speak out forcefully on the issue enabled members of their respective factions to ignore party discipline and abstain from voting. The backing of these leaders and particularly of Andreotti--who has staked out an ambiguous position on TNF to avoid alienating the Communists--is crucial if the Christian Democrats are to remain committed to the Alliance decision.

The Communists are likely to maintain their public opposition to the TNF program. However, the party's apparent commitment to demonstrate its "autonomy" in foreign affairs may make it receptive to briefings on the issue. Key Communists concerned with TNF are defense experts Ugo Pecchioli and Franco Calamandrei, foreign affairs specialist Sergio Segre and Secretariat member

Giorgio Napolitano. The TNF program ultimately may have to be implemented by a government in which the Communists play some role, and the attitudes of these individuals will be pivotal to the party's willingness to consider acquiescing in Italy's TNF commitments.



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